

## **Vermont Communications (VCOMM)**

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On Wednesday 12/12/12 the VCOMM Steering Committee held a grant request review meeting in Waterbury. The latest round of requests totaled \$2,815,221.96 and the amount of available funding remaining in the FY10 Homeland Security Grant Program supporting this initiative was \$497,603.18. As outlined in the September 26, 2012 memo from Captain Reinfurt, the VCOMM Steering Committee prioritized sub-grant awards by “a) applications that are complete and in compliance with the requirements as outlined in this memo, the FY10 HSGP Guidelines and Requirements, and the FY10 HSGP Narrative, and b) the order listed in the FY10 HSGP Guidelines and Requirements.” As always, there was not enough funding to fulfill everyone’s requests.

For nearly five years the VCOMM Steering Committee has been educating the first responder community about the FCC narrowbanding mandate, encouraging agencies to modify their FCC licenses to narrowband and approving applications for federal funding to replace non-narrowband capable equipment. The FCC deadline for narrowband compliance was 01/01/13. While this deadline has passed, it is important for departments that still have wideband FCC licenses and non-narrowband capable equipment to take the necessary actions to become narrowband compliant. More information can be found on the VCOMM web site, <http://vermontcommunications.vermont.gov/narrowbanding>, and on the Federal Communications Commission web site, <http://transition.fcc.gov/pshs/public-safety-spectrum/narrowbanding.html>.

Construction of the VCOMM Lifeline is nearing completion. Killington tower construction was recently completed. This was a very challenging and costly site. We were required to combine multiple towers into one robust structure rugged enough to withstand the fierce winter conditions at that elevation. Due to the onset of winter, the combination and removal of the old towers will take place this spring. Final testing, tweaking and acceptance will follow.

VCOMM has also encountered some conflicts that need to be resolved. At some of the twenty-five sites there is an interference issue with VTrans radios. At some other sites about the state there have been some interference issues surface. There have also been numerous issues to solve at the four

local Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) where VCOMM replaced dispatch equipment. Harris Corporation, the vendor for the Lifeline contract, has been receptive to these issues, having recently dedicated some very knowledgeable engineers to the task of solving these problems.

VCOMM has come to a major milestone and decision making fork in the road. The Lifeline System will have a one-year warranty upon date of acceptance of the final system. Maintenance of the Lifeline system has now come to the forefront of the Steering Committee's planning process. The Homeland Security Grant Program allocation to VCOMM beginning in FY11 will be primarily dedicated to meeting these unknown maintenance costs. We have looked at several options. Harris Corporation has provided quotes for varying levels of maintenance contracts. Some of these are very costly. We have spoken to the Department of Public Safety, Criminal Justice Services staff about providing maintenance for the Lifeline and at this point they don't have the resources to provide adequate service.

We have requested our project management team, L.R. Kimball, to draft a Request for Information (RFI) for maintenance of the Lifeline to get a better idea of what this service will cost and what vendors are qualified for and interested in providing this service. We are in hopes that there is a company close enough, or inside Vermont, capable of providing the adequate maintenance level we need and that it will be at an affordable price.

On 12/18/12 we met with Harris Corporation engineers about a possible Phase II to the Lifeline. VCOMM knows that due to terrain, narrow-banding, and loss of crucial sites in Phase I there will be coverage gaps. We opened the discussion with Harris to identify and rectify coverage in these areas.

In light of all these facts, the VCOMM Steering Committee decided not to set up another round of the communications equipment grant. Our priority will be to decide on a maintenance team and how to sustain the ongoing costs associated with the Lifeline (e.g. lease lines, site leases, etc.). We also need to fill the coverage gaps we have already been identified and those that may be identified in the future. We did not want to entertain the submission of new requests, only to find that there were no funds to distribute. This would waste a lot of valuable agency staff time and cause disappointment. If we reach a point where VCOMM has funding available to use for communications equipment requests, we will notify first responders.

If at any point in time a problem arises, posing life threatening issues, please contact VCOMM Steering Committee members. In emergencies you can contact me or LT Michael Manning at 802-241-5095 or [Michael.Manning@state.vt.us](mailto:Michael.Manning@state.vt.us).